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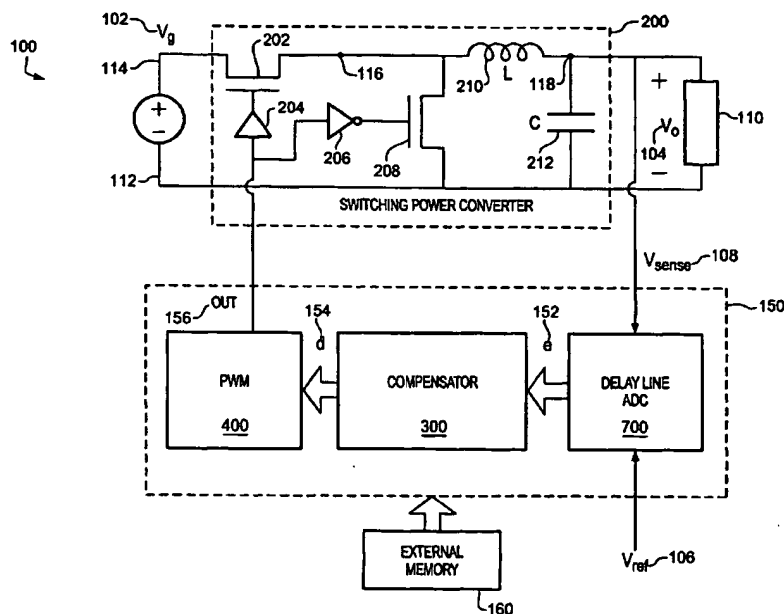
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: **DIGITAL CONTROLLER FOR HIGH-FREQUENCY SWITCHING POWER SUPPLIES**



(57) Abstract: A voltage controller (150), the controller comprising: a voltage comparator (700) operative to provide a digital error signal (152); a compensator (300) operative to determine a digital control signal (154) based on said provided error signal; and a modulator (400) operative to provide a power control signal (156) based on said determined digital control signal, wherein said comparator, said compensator, and said modulator are implemented entirely with digital logic gates.



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VOLTAGE CONTROLLER FOR SWITCHING POWER SUPPLIES

RELATED APPLICATIONS

The instant application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent
5 Application No. 60/338,712, filed 12 December 2001, entitled "Digital Controller for
High Frequency Switching Power Supplies", the disclosure of which application is
hereby incorporated by reference. This instant application also claims priority to U.S.
Patent Application No. 10/291,098 entitled "Adaptive Voltage Regulator for Powered
Digital Devices", filed 8 November 2002, the disclosure of which application is
10 hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. *Field of the Invention*

The invention relates in general to voltage control and in particular to digital
voltage control for high frequency voltage regulators.

15 2. *Statement of the Problem*

Analog voltage controllers are widely used in cooperation with power
converters for DC-DC (direct-current to direct-current) converters. Analog controllers
are fast and can generally be built with widely available analog components.
However, the operation of analog controllers depends on the precision of the
20 individual components included therein. Accordingly, considerable effort must be
expended to ensure selection of analog components adhering to very precise quality
control standards. Moreover, even after such careful selection, the behavior of
analog components is subject to variations in manufacturing processes, operating
temperatures, and degradation over time. Moreover, analog designs are not readily
25 realized employing existing automated design methods. Accordingly, the design of
analog controllers tends to be time-consuming and labor intensive.

Some existing voltage controllers include one or more digitally implemented
components. However, the digital components implemented in existing voltage
controllers have not performed as desired. For example, digital signal processors
30 (DSPs) have been implemented to perform arithmetic operations, such as
multiplication, as part of the operation of a compensator, within a voltage controller.
However, these DSP implementations are slow, take up a lot of space, and are
excessively complex for the task being performed. Moreover, because the DSPs
require digital data to operate, their implementation incurs the need for large and
35 energy-expensive analog to digital converters (ADCs). The ADCs included in such

controllers are precision analog components which take up an inordinate amount of valuable space on chips, consume large amounts of power, and are subject to the same temperature-induced and process-induced performance variations as are analog components of the older existing controllers.

- 5 Accordingly, the art of voltage control would benefit from the provision of a voltage controller which is small, energy and space-efficient, and whose performance is not dependent of the temperature and process variations of individual controller components.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

- 10 The present invention advances the art and helps to overcome the aforementioned problems by providing a small, fast, accurate, energy-efficient voltage controller, the performance of which is independent of temperature-variations and other variations in the characteristics of component parts. In the preferred embodiment, all functions of the inventive controller are implemented employing
- 15 digital logic gates, thereby avoiding the need for, and the performance variations of, precision analog components. In the preferred embodiment, the digital logic gates forming the inventive controller can be effectively modeled employing existing electronic design automation, such as hardware description languages (HDLs), thereby simplifying and shortening design time.

- 20 A delay line ADC, preferably consisting exclusively of digital logic gates, preferably provides a digitally encoded error signal indicative of a disparity between an output voltage and a reference voltage. The delay line ADC disclosed herein thereby preferably performs the function associated with analog voltage comparison devices in existing analog controllers. Separately, the delay line ADC preferably
- 25 performs the function of a combination of an ADC and a digital voltage comparison device in existing partially digitally implemented voltage controllers.

- In the preferred embodiment, a hybrid digital pulse width modulator and compensator are also digitally implemented. In the preferred embodiment, the compensator includes a lookup table for rapidly converting a digital error signal from
- 30 the delay line ADC into a digital control signal, which is preferably a digitally expressed duty ratio, provided as output from the compensator. In the preferred embodiment, a digital pulse width modulator receives the compensator-provided digital control signal as input and converts this digital signal into a duty ratio-controlled time varying control signal as output from the controller. Preferably, the

controller output is provided to a power converter to increase or decrease the regulator output voltage, depending on the results of a comparison between the output voltage and the reference voltage.

The advantages of implementing the digital controller technology disclosed herein include the following. A fully digital controller could be very attractive in high-frequency, low-to-medium power DC-DC converters because of the inherently lower sensitivity to process and parameter variations, the ready programmability of various controller performance characteristics, the reduction or elimination of passive components for tuning, and the ease of integration with other digital systems. A benefit arising from compensator programmability and from the absence of the need to tune passive components is that the same controller hardware could be used with a range of power converter configurations and power-stage parameter values. In addition, with digital controller implementation, it is possible to implement control schemes that are impractical for analog controller designs.

For example, it is desirable to have the ability to precisely match phase-shifted duty ratios to a simple, robust control for voltage regulator modules (VRMs) using a dedicated digital controller IC (integrated circuit). In transformer-isolated DC-DC converters, digital signal transmission through the isolation can be used to address limited bandwidth and/or large gain variations associated with standard analog approaches. In general, more sophisticated control methods could be used to achieve improved dynamic responses.

Another advantage of the digital approach is that well established and automated digital design approaches can be applied. A controller design may be described at the functional level using a hardware description language (HDL). Preferably, synthesis, simulation, and verification tools are available to target the design to implementation to standard cell ASICs (application-specific integrated circuits) or FPGAs (field programmable gate arrays) from the HDL description. The design can then be implemented employing different manufacturing processes, integrated with other digital systems, or modified to meet updated specifications. In contrast to analog IC controller realizations, the digital controller design preferably scales well, and can thus take advantage of advances in fabrication technologies, without design alteration.

The above and other advantages of the present invention may be better understood from a reading of the following description of the preferred exemplary

embodiments of the invention taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a voltage regulator including a digital voltage controller according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

5 FIG. 2 is a plot of the transient response of output voltage and output current obtained with the regulator of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of the operation of the digital voltage controller of FIG. 1;

10 FIG. 4 is a block diagram of the pulse width modulator included in the digital voltage controller of FIG. 1;

FIG. 5 is a plot of waveforms of signal values of the pulse width modulator of FIG. 4;

FIG. 6 is a plot of duty ratio output as a function of digital input for the pulse width modulator of FIG. 4;

15 FIG. 7 is a block diagram of the delay line ADC included in the voltage controller of FIG. 1;

FIG. 8 is a schematic diagram of a delay cell ADC corresponding to the delay cells included in the delay line of FIG. 7;

20 FIG. 9 is a plot of timing waveforms for tap signals of the delay line ADC of FIG. 7;

FIG. 10 is a plot of the conversion characteristic of the delay line ADC of FIG. 7;

FIG. 11 is a block diagram of a preferred digital calibration scheme for the delay line ADC of FIG. 7;

25 FIG. 12 is a plot of timing waveforms of the calibration scheme of FIG. 11;

FIG. 13A is a plot of the measured load voltage regulation against load current for the voltage regulator of FIG. 1;

FIG. 13B is a plot of the measured load voltage regulation against supply voltage for the voltage regulator of FIG. 1; and

30 FIG. 14 is a block diagram of the function of encoder 730 included in the delay line ADC 700 of FIG. 7.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

In this disclosure, a transistor terminal is either the source or drain of a field effect transistor (FET) or the emitter or collector of a bipolar junction transistor (BJT).

Herein, a comparator is any device that receives two voltage values and which provides as output a signal indicative of a difference between the two received voltage values. Herein, the terms "comparator" and "voltage comparator" are used interchangeably. In this disclosure, energy-storing components include both analog and digital devices, including for instance, capacitors, inductors and powered digital logic gates. The term "energy-storing components" is intended to exclude wiring and other conductive apparatus operative merely to connect one electronic component to another. Herein, a resistor is a device having resistance concentrated in a lump form. Herein, a resistor does include wiring or other conductive links between electronic components. Herein, an electronic memory is a digital electronic storage device able to supply stored values in response to an identification of an address in the electronic memory of the stored values. Herein, a digital electronic calculator may include a digital electronic storage device and/or digital devices for performing arithmetic operations including any one or more of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and/or division.

Herein, a signal tap array may include any number of signal taps. A signal tap array preferably includes a plurality of signal taps, each tap connected to one delay cell within an array of delay cells. However, a signal tap array may include signal taps connected to only a subset of delay cells within a delay cell array. Herein, binary digital code is conventional digital code in which a sequence of bits identifies coefficients of values equal to number "2" raised to different powers. For example, digital code "101" corresponds to $1 \cdot 1 + 0 \cdot 2 + 1 \cdot 4 = 5$. Binary digital code is distinguished from "thermometer code" in which each bit in a sequence is of equal numerical weight.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a voltage regulator 100 including a digital voltage controller 150 according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Regulator 100 preferably includes power converter 200 and controller 150. Power converter ("converter") 100 is preferably a synchronous buck converter. Power converter preferably includes gate driver 204 which is connected to the gate of transistor switch 202, a first terminal of which transistor is connected to supply voltage 102 positive node 114 and a second terminal of which is connected to node 116. Gate driver 206 provides an output connected to the gate of transistor switch 208, one terminal of which transistor is connected to supply voltage negative node 112 and the other terminal of which is connected to node 116. Inductor 210 is

preferably located between node 116 and node 118. Capacitor 212 is preferably located between node 118 and node 112.

In the embodiment of FIG. 1, power converter 200 is connected to supply voltage V_g 102 and produces output voltage V_o 104 which is connected between node 118 and node 112 of converter 200 across load 110, which is connected in parallel with capacitor 212. The operation of converter 200 is known in the art and is therefore not discussed in detail in this disclosure. It will be appreciated that the present invention is not limited to the design of converter 200. A wide range of designs and principles of operation may be incorporated into converter 200 which would not affect the operation of the preferred embodiment of controller 150. It will be appreciated that converter 200 of FIG. 1 is merely one of many converter designs which could be employed in conjunction with controller 150.

In the preferred embodiment, controller 150 includes delay line ADC 700, compensator 300, and pulse width modulator (PWM) 400, which is preferably a hybrid digital pulse width modulator. Preferably, voltages V_{sense} 108 and V_{ref} 106 are inputs to controller 150, and, in particular, to delay line ADC 700. Equipment (not shown) for providing V_{ref} 106 is preferably not part of controller 150. Preferably, external memory 160 is available to supply information to compensator 300, when needed. Delay line ADC 700 preferably serves as a voltage comparator in the embodiment of FIG. 1. While delay line ADC 700 is the preferred voltage comparator in the present application, the current invention is not limited to the use of delay line ADC 700 for generation of a signal indicative of a voltage difference between voltages V_{sense} 108 and V_{ref} 106. In alternative embodiments, a range of devices, either analog or digital, for providing a signal indicative of a voltage difference between two voltage sources may be employed in controller 150, and all such variations are intended to be included within the scope of the present invention.

In this embodiment, converter 200 and controller 150 form a closed-loop feedback system 100, to preferably regulate output voltage V_o 104 to match a stable voltage reference V_{ref} 106 (or a scaled version of the reference) over a range of input voltage 102 values and load currents, and over a range of process and temperature variations. In this embodiment, output voltage 104 is sensed and compared to V_{ref} 106. Digital error signal 152 is preferably transmitted to compensator 300. Compensator 300 output (digital control signal) 154 is the input to pulse width modulator 400, which in turn preferably produces a constant frequency variable duty

ratio signal (power control signal) 156 to control the switching power transistors 202, 208. The preferred embodiment of a digital controller architecture to implement this control scheme is shown in FIG. 3.

Preferably, V_{sense} 108 is a scaled version of V_o 104. Expressing this mathematically, we have $V_{\text{sense}} = HV_o$. However, in this disclosure, for the sake of simplicity, H is considered to have a value of 1. Thus, for the remaining discussion, V_{sense} 108 and V_o 104 have the same value. Preferably, V_o 104 is sampled by an A/D (analog to digital) converter to produce digital error signal $e(n)$ 152. Preferably, sampling of V_o 104 occurs once per switching period T_s . Here, the index value of "n" refers to the current switching period.

Generally, effective voltage regulation generally requires that $V_o(t)$ 104 remain within a defined range of V_{ref} 106, from $V_{\text{ref}} - (\Delta V_o)_{\text{max}}/2$ to $V_{\text{ref}} + (\Delta V_o)_{\text{max}}/2$. Otherwise stated, the permissible range for steady-state output voltage 104 is $V_o = V_{\text{ref}} \pm \Delta V_o/2$. To maintain V_o 104 within the permissible range, the analog equivalent of the least significant bit (LSB) in the A/D characteristic should not be greater than the desired magnitude of ΔV_o . Preferably, the specifications for ΔV_o and $(\Delta V_o)_{\text{max}}$ are such that only a few digital values are needed to represent the magnitude of the analog voltage error, which is equal to V_{ref} 106 - V_{sense} 108.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of the operation of digital voltage controller 150 of FIG. 1. In the embodiment of FIG. 3, the digital representation of error signal 152 assumes one of nine values, from -4 to +4 (decimal). Although ADC 158 preferably has sufficiently fine resolution to accurately regulate V_o 104, only a few bits are needed to represent digital error signal $e(n)$ 152. In the preferred embodiment, the value of digital error signal 152 is used as a lookup table address. Thus, any arbitrary association may be established between the magnitude of digital error signal 152 and the magnitude of the numerical entries located at the lookup table address pointed to by the digital error signal 152 value. Table 1, located later in this document, identifies a preferred embodiment correlation between digital error signal values and the magnitude of the control signal desired. Herein, the "digital error magnitude" is a value that corresponds to the magnitude of the disparity between the measured voltages. Preferably, a digital error signal corresponds to the lookup table address at which its digital error magnitude is located.

A novel delay line ADC configuration 700 that takes advantage of the required static A/D characteristic and which lends itself to a simple digital implementation is

described in connection with FIG. 7. It will be appreciated that delay line ADC 700 is the preferred although not the only available embodiment of ADC 158.

In addition to relaxing the requirements for ADC 158, the ability to represent error signal 152 with a limited number of bits enables a simplified implementation of the next controller component – compensator 300. Preferably, compensator 300 uses the value of digital error signal 152, optionally along with stored values of signal 152 from previous cycles, to calculate a digital control signal 154, which in the preferred embodiment, is a digitally expressed duty ratio of a constant frequency signal.

The computation within compensator 300 may be established in accordance with established digital control theory. However, standard implementation of linear control laws in compensator 300 would generally involve the use of digital adder(s) and/or digital multiplier(s), which devices increase the size of controller 150 and which tend to increase the clock frequency requirements for controller 150. To beneficially exploit the fact that only a small number of bits are needed to represent digital error signal 152, the preferred embodiment of compensator 300 instead calculates duty ratio 154 using look-up tables 302, 304, and 306 and adder 318. Preferably, the current and the previous values of digital error signal 152 serve as address(es) from which values may be obtained in lookup tables 302, 304, and 306. Since digital error signal 152 preferably assumes only a small number of values, the number of entries in the lookup tables 302, 304, and 306 is correspondingly small. Consequently, the implementation of tables 302, 304, and 306 requires only minimal real estate on a chip. Moreover, the calculation of duty ratio 154 can preferably be accomplished in a small number of system clock 120 cycles. Although the discussion of FIG. 3 is directed to an embodiment including three lookup tables and one adder, it will be appreciated that more than one adder could be employed and that fewer or more than three lookup tables could be employed.

Preferably, compensator 300 can be programmed to perform different control algorithms by adjusting the values of entries in lookup tables 302, 304, and 306.

One control algorithm supported in the embodiment of FIG. 3 is described as follows:

(1) $d(n+1) = d(n) + \alpha(e(n)) + \beta(e(n-1)) + \gamma(e(n-2))$, where $\alpha(\cdot)$, $\beta(\cdot)$ and $\gamma(\cdot)$ may be either linear or nonlinear functions of digital error signal 152. However, a variety of control algorithms can be implemented. One additional example is described by:

$$(2) \quad d(n+1) = d(n) + ae(n) + be(n-1) + ce(n-2),$$

where a , b , and c are constants and corresponds to a basic PID (proportional, integral, and derivative) control algorithm. In the design of controller 150, once the coefficients a , b and c are selected (to achieve a desired closed-loop bandwidth and adequate phase margin, for example), the products $a \cdot e$, $b \cdot e$, and $c \cdot e$ are preferably pre-computed for all possible values of the error " e " and preferably programmed into lookup tables 302, 304, and 306 from external memory 160. As an alternative to using external memory 160, lookup tables 302, 304, and 306 could be preprogrammed and hard-wired on the chip at design time, or programmed from other system components via a suitable interface at run time. Thus, external memory 160 is one beneficial approach to supplying data to lookup tables 302, 304, and 306, but alternatives approaches, as discussed above, are available.

The programmability of compensator 300 preferably enables the same controller 150 hardware to be used with different power-stage configurations and different power-stage parameters by modifying data entries to lookup tables 302, 304, and 306 rather than by making hardware changes. Moreover, compensator 300 preferably enables experimentation with various nonlinear control algorithms without requiring the labor-intensive, time-consuming, and inconvenient replacement of precise analog components.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of pulse width modulator 400 included in the digital voltage controller of FIG. 1. FIG. 5 is a plot of waveforms of various signal values of the pulse width modulator of FIG. 4. Pulse width modulator (PWM) 400, which is preferably a hybrid digital PWM, preferably completes the controller architecture. PWM 400 preferably produces the periodic waveform $c(t)$ 156 from duty ratio 154 and preferably controls transistor switches 202 and 208 in power converter 200 therewith. Preferably, PWM 400 may be beneficially employed to achieve high switching frequency operation and control of V_o 104 within a small, defined range.

PWM 400 preferably operates as a D/A converter (DAC) in voltage regulator 100. Generally, the PWM 400 resolution determines the available set of output voltage 104 values. If the PWM 400 resolution is not sufficiently high, an undesirable limit-cycle oscillation in the value of V_o 104 can result. If none of the achievable output voltages 104 fall into the range of ΔV_o around V_{ref} 106, duty ratio 154 will generally oscillate between two or more values. Avoidance of this limit-cycle operation may be achieved by ensuring that the output voltage increment that

corresponds to the least-significant bit of duty ratio 154 is smaller than ΔV_o . This condition has been evaluated as a function of the steady state input and output voltages for different converter configurations.

A high-resolution, high-frequency digital pulse-width modulator (DPWM) can be constructed using a fast-clocked counter and a digital comparator. To achieve n -bit resolution at the switching frequency f_s , the desired clock frequency is $2^n f_s$. This desired clock frequency generally leads to more demanding timing constraints and increased power consumption. For example, an 8-bit resolution at the switching frequency of $f_s = 1\text{MHz}$ would require a clock frequency of 256MHz. It has been shown that fine time resolution and much lower power consumption can be achieved using a tapped delay-line scheme similar to a ring oscillator that operates at the switching frequency. However, this implementation requires a larger-area digital multiplexer. The PWM architecture selected for use in the preferred embodiment is based on a hybrid delay-line/counter approach. In this approach, n -bit resolution is achieved using an n_c -bit counter (where $n_c < n$), whereas the remaining $n_d = n - n_c$ bits of resolution are obtained from a tapped delay line.

The embodiment of FIG. 4 is a PWM 400 where 4-bit ($n = 4$) resolution is obtained using 2-bit counter ($n_c = 2$) 406 and a 4-cell ring oscillator ($n_d = 2$, $2^{n_d} = 4$) 402 which includes flip-flops 416, 418, 420, and 422 operating as delay cells. Preferably, at the beginning of a switching cycle, output SR flip-flop 410 is set, and the PWM 400 output pulse $c(t)$ 156 goes high. Preferably, a pulse propagates through oscillator 402 at a frequency of $2^{n_d} f_s = 4f_s$ which pulse serves as the clock pulse for the counter 406. The switching period is preferably divided into $2^{n_d} 2^{n_c} = 16$ slots. Preferably, when counter 406 output matches the top n_c 452 most significant bits of digital input 154 and a pulse reaches the tap selected by the n_d 450 least significant bits of digital input 154, output flip-flop 410 is reset, and the output pulse goes low.

It will be appreciated that resolution employing any number of bits n 450 may be employed, including a wide range of values for n_c 452 and n_d 454 may be employed. Preferably, a "pulse-on" period during which output pulse 156 (power command signal) is on corresponds to the value of digital input 154. This "pulse-on" duration is preferably the product of the duty ratio, expressed by digital input 154, and the switching period (reciprocal of f_s , the switching period). In order to avoid the very high clock frequencies needed to accurately establish the pulse-on period with

high resolution using only a counter and comparator, the pulse-on period is preferably established by separately establishing two separate components of the pulse-on period. For a given switching period, determination of the first and second components of the pulse-on period for output signal 156 effectively determines the first and second components of the duty ratio for output signal 156.

In the preferred embodiment, a first component, or first portion, of the pulse-on period is preferably established using a selection n_c 452 of the highest ordered bits of digital input 154. Counter 406 preferably counts to a value equal to "2" raised to the power n_c 452 at clock frequency 120. A second component, or second portion, of the pulse-on period is preferably established using the n_d 454 lowest ordered bits of the original n 450 bits of digital input 154. The second component of the pulse-on period is preferably established using a delay line 402 having a specified number of flip-flops. The number of flip-flops used is preferably equal to 2 raised to the power n_d 454. Preferably, the magnitude of the digital value of the sequence of n_d 454 bits determines the number of flip-flop delays which form the second component of the pulse-on period. This hybrid (combination of counter and delay line) approach preferably avoids the need for an extremely high frequency for counter 406 while still maintaining high accuracy for the resulting pulse-on period during which output signal $c(t)$ 156 is high.

In the exemplary waveforms of FIG. 5, the duty ratio of the output pulse is 11/16. The basic delay cell in ring oscillator 402 of FIG. 4 consists of a single resettable flip-flop. Preferably, the delay of each of cells 416, 418, 420, and 422 and the number of cells in ring 402 determine the switching frequency f_s . To adjust the switching frequency, any cell of cells 416, 418, 420, and 422 can be modified by inserting additional delay elements between the output of a cell and the input to a succeeding cell. The additional delay elements can be standard logic gates, or gates with adjustable delay, if switching frequency tuning or synchronization with an external clock are desired.

The self-oscillating DPWM (digital pulse width modulator) embodiment shown in FIG. 4 has several desirable properties including a simple HDL description, an even number of time slots in a period, an ability to stop and restart the oscillations on command (by gating the propagation of the signal through the ring), and relatively small size. An experimental prototype chip was designed in which the DPWM had 8-bit resolution ($n = 8$) using a 3-bit counter ($n_c = 3$) and a 32-cell long ring ($n_d = 5$).

PWM 400 preferably operates at a switching frequency of $f_s = 1$ MHz. The ring preferably oscillates at $2^n f_s = 8$ MHz. This 8 MHz signal is preferably used as the system clock for the entire chip. Experimental results for PWM 400, depicted in FIG. 6, show the measured duty ratio of the output pulses as a function of 8-bit digital input 154. The minimum (3.1%) duty ratio and the maximum (97.3%) duty ratio are preferably established during a design phase.

Generally, static and dynamic output voltage regulation capabilities depend on the characteristics of the A/D converter employed. Conventional, high-speed, high-resolution A/D converters consume power and chip area, and require precision analog components. Also, in a switching power supply, the sensed analog voltage signal is provided by a switching power converter. This signal generally has a lot of switching noise, which can be a problem for many conventional A/D converters such as the basic flash configuration. Accordingly, the inventors sought an alternative ADC embodiment, which is described below in connection with FIG. 7.

FIG. 7 is a block diagram of delay line ADC 700 preferably forming part of voltage controller 150 of FIG. 1. FIG. 8 is a schematic diagram of delay cell ADC 800 corresponding to the delay cells 710, 712, 714, 716, and 718 included in the delay line ADC 700 of FIG. 7. Timing waveforms embodiment of delay-line ADC 700 embodiment of FIG. 7 are shown in FIG. 9. In this disclosure, the designation "delay cell 800" will be used when referring to a delay cell in general. Where a particular delay cell is indicated, the reference numeral designating that delay cell will be employed. Preferably, each delay cell 800 has an input 804, an output 810, and a reset input R 812. Preferably, when reset input 812 is active high, cell output 810 is reset to zero. In the preferred embodiment, an array 740 of delay cells (preferably comprising logic gates) 800 receives sensed analog voltage 108. Thus, $V_{\text{sense } 108} = V_{DD}$ for each cell in array 740.

The preferred embodiment of delay-line ADC 700 converter is based on the principle that the propagation delay of a CMOS-type (complementary metal oxide semiconductor) logic gate increases if the gate supply voltage is reduced. To the first order, the propagation delay t_d of a signal through a CMOS logic gate as a function of the supply voltage V_{DD} is given by:

$$(3) \quad t_d = K \frac{V_{DD}}{(V_{DD} - V_{th})^2},$$

where V_{th} is the CMOS device threshold voltage, and K is a constant that depends on the device/process parameters, and the capacitive loading of the gate. Clearly, increasing V_{DD} results in shorter propagation delay. For supply voltages higher than the threshold V_{th} , the delay is approximately inversely proportional to V_{DD} .

5 To perform a conversion, at the beginning of a switching cycle, test signal 704 is propagated through cell array 740. After a fixed conversion-time interval, which is preferably equal to $(6/8)T_s$ in the example waveforms of FIG. 9, taps t_1 728 to t_8 736 are preferably sampled by "sample" signal 738 which is preferably the clock pulse for the series 750 of D-type flip-flops 720, 722, 724, and 726. The result at flip-flop
10 outputs q_1 752 to q_8 758 is preferably communicated to digital encoder 730 to produce digital error signal 152. Preferably, the last portion of the switching cycle is used to reset all cells in delay line 700, to prepare for the next conversion cycle.

As V_{sense} 108 increases, cell delay t_d decreases, and test pulse 704 propagates further within cell array 740. Conversely, As V_{sense} 108 decreases, cell
15 delay t_d increases, and test pulse 704 propagates to fewer cells 800 within cell array 740. The sampled tap outputs (q_1 to q_8) give the A/D conversion result in "thermometer" digital code. For example, for the case illustrated by the waveforms 900 of FIG. 9, the test pulse propagates to the taps t_1 through t_6 , but not to the taps t_7 and t_8 , such that the sequence 770 of flip-flop digital outputs (q_1, q_2, \dots, q_8) equals:
20 11111100.

Ideally, V_{sense} 108 equals V_{ref} 106, and test pulse 704 propagates to the first half 760 of the tapped delay cells. In the embodiment of FIG. 7, this zero-error case corresponds to the flip-flop outputs equaling ($q_1, q_2, q_3, q_4, q_5, q_6, q_7, q_8$) = 11110000. Preferably, encoder 152 converts the sequence of flip-flop outputs 770 into digital
25 information encoded in a more useful form. In the preferred embodiment, this more useful form is digital error signal 152.

In the preferred embodiment, digital error signal 152 provides a value indicative of the difference, or error, between V_{sense} 108 and V_{ref} 106. The desired steady state operation of the power supply corresponds to a digital error signal 152
30 value of zero. Preferably, encoder 730 provides a digital error signal 152 having a digital value, the magnitude of which is proportional to the analog voltage difference between V_{sense} 108 and V_{ref} 106. Table 1 and the discussion below expand on the function of encoder 730. The "digital error magnitude" was discussed earlier in this

disclosure. For the sake of consistency of terminology, the term "digital error magnitude" is included in Table 1. However, the entries in the table are expressed in decimal form for convenience.

Vsense Range	Thermometer Code	Digital Error Magnitude	Encoder 730 output
$V_{sense} < 2.38$	11111111	+4	0000
$2.38 \leq V_{sense} < 2.42$	01111111	+3	0001
$2.42 \leq V_{sense} < 2.46$	00111111	+2	0010
$2.46 \leq V_{sense} < 2.50$	00011111	+2	0011
$2.50 \leq V_{sense} < 2.54$	00001111	+1	0100
$2.54 \leq V_{sense} < 2.58$	00000111	0	0101
$2.58 \leq V_{sense} < 2.62$	00000011	-1	0110
$2.62 \leq V_{sense} < 2.66$	00000001	-2	0111
$2.66 \leq V_{sense}$	00000000	-3	1000

Table 1: Delay line specifications.

FIG. 14 is a block diagram of the function of converter 730 included in the delay line ADC 700 of FIG. 7. In the preferred embodiment, encoder 730 accepts the delay line ADC 700 thermometer code 772 as input and outputs encoded digital output 152. Thermometer code 772 is the sequence of digital values included in sequence 770 of flip-flop outputs. Thermometer code is preferably directed to differentiator block 774 which differential vector 776 and overflow indicator 778 to encoder block 784. Encoder block thereafter provides digital output 152.

The second and third columns of Table 1 specify the input to and output from encoder 730. Since this is a simple binary translation from one encoding scheme to another, the encoder can be implemented using behavioral HDL and synthesis techniques. However, other conversion mechanisms may be employed. It will be appreciated that the data in table 1 is exemplary. Different voltage ranges of V_{sense} may be associated with the digital values in columns 2 and 3 for one or more of the entries in table 1.

In the preferred embodiment of delay line ADC 700, the length of the delay cell array 740 effectively determines the reference voltage value around which the analog to digital conversion characteristic is centered. The number of cells 800 and the delay of each cell 800 preferably determine the range $(\Delta V_o)_{max}$ and the effective LSB voltage resolution of the delay line ADC 700. In an experimental prototype chip, the delay-line length and the cell delay were designed (by simulation) to have values $V_{ref} \approx 2.5V$, and $\Delta V_o \approx 40$ mV. Eight cells 800, each with associated taps, preferably

provide an A/D voltage conversion range $(\Delta V_o)_{\max} = (8+1)\Delta V_o \approx 360 \text{ mV}$.

Some advantages of the preferred delay-line ADC 700 are that its basic configuration does not require any precision analog components and that it can be implemented using standard digital logic gates. Therefore, delay line ADC 700 scales well and can be based on an HDL description. When using delay line ADC 700, sampling at high switching frequencies (in the range from hundreds of KHz to several MHz) can be readily accomplished using integrated circuits made using modern sub-micron CMOS processes. Moreover, the preferred embodiment of delay line ADC 700 has built-in noise immunity, which noise immunity arises from the fact that the sampling can extend over a large portion of the switching period over which the input analog signal V_{sense} 108 is effectively averaged. Therefore, digital output 152 is preferably not affected by sharp noise spikes in the output voltage 104 of power converter 200.

The conversion characteristic 1000 measured for a prototype version delay line ADC 700 is shown in FIG. 10. The shaded portions of the characteristic (plot) 1000 indicate voltages for which digital output code 152 may assume one of two consecutive values. Characteristic 1000 exhibits some non-linearity but is monotonic. And, the widths of the code "bins" are approximately equal to the desired ΔV_o value. In a voltage regulator application, the A/D imperfections (code-flipping and non-linearity) have very little effect on the closed-loop operation. During steady state operation, output voltage 104 preferably converges on a voltage corresponding to a digital error signal 152 value of zero. On a set of 10 prototype chips, the inventors found the average of the zero-error bin width to be equal to 53 mV, with a standard deviation of 3.6 mV. The measured reference voltage was $V_{\text{ref}} = 2.7 \text{ V}$, while the measured current consumption of the delay line ADC 700 was about $10 \mu\text{A}$.

The basic delay-line ADC 700 results in a reference voltage V_{ref} 106 that is indirectly determined by the length of the delay line 700 and by the delay-versus-voltage characteristic of each delay cell 800. In practice, because of process and temperature variations, the reference value obtained by the basic delay-line A/D configuration is difficult to precisely control. Variation of the effective V_{ref} 106 causes variation in the regulated output voltage 104, and this variation could cause regulator 100 to perform sub-optimally. Accordingly, delay line ADC 700 is preferably calibrated prior to being implemented in an operating voltage regulator 100. Otherwise stated, the extent of delay in delay line ADC 700 is preferably correlated

with known voltage values. This established correlation is preferably employed during later operation of controller 150 to reliably associate an extent of test pulse 704 signal propagation delay along delay cell array 740 with a particular voltage.

FIG. 11 is a block diagram of a preferred digital calibration scheme 1100 for delay line ADC 700 of FIG. 7; and FIG. 12 is a plot of timing waveforms of the calibration scheme 1100 of FIG. 11. A preferred calibration approach involves applying a stable, precise reference calibration reference voltage 1102, preferably generated using standard bandgap techniques, to the input 782 of delay line ADC 700 and to digitally subtract the conversion result from the digital output 152 value obtained when the actual analog input voltage V_{sense} 106 is applied. Calibration reference voltage 1102 may, but need not, be the same as reference voltage 106 discussed in connection with FIGS 1, 3, and 7.

In the preferred embodiment, two conversions are performed in each switching period. In one half of the switching period, the calibration reference voltage V_{ref} 1102 is preferably applied to delay line ADC 700. The result of the reference conversion e_{ref} 1108 is ideally 0, but the actual value can have finite magnitude because of process and temperature variations. Reference conversion error value e_{ref} 1108 is preferably stored in register 1106. In the second part of the period, V_{sense} 108 is preferably applied to delay line ADC 200 provides an un-calibrated digital output 152, as described in connection with FIG. 7, corresponding to the analog voltage value of V_{sense} 108. Thereafter, un-calibrated output 152 is preferably subtracted from e_{ref} 1108 to obtain calibrated digital output 1152. In the preferred embodiment, where calibration is employed, calibrated digital output 1152 is used instead of uncalibrated digital output 152, thereby providing greater accuracy for correction of output voltage V_o 104. Herein, the terms "calibrated digital output", "corrected digital output", "calibrated digital error signal", and "corrected digital error signal" are used interchangeably.

The generation of the reference conversion error value 1108 may, but need not, be conducted in each switching period. An appropriate frequency of reference conversion may be selected based on the characteristics of a particular voltage controller 150. Separately, other calibration schemes may be implemented in conjunction with the present invention including but not limited to schemes based on delay-locked loop (DLL) principles.

Controller 150, described herein, was designed and implemented in a

standard 0.5 μ (micron) CMOS process. The chip design was described using HDL. Synthesis and timing verification tools were used to reduce the design to standard cell gates. A preferred embodiment of delay line ADC 700 occupies less than 0.2 mm² (square millimeters). The total active chip area for controller 150 is preferably
5 less than 1 mm².

In the preferred embodiment, compensator 300 includes 3 tables (for $e(n)$, $e(n-1)$, and $e(n-2)$). Preferably, digital error signal 152 generated by delay line ADC 700 can have 9 possible values. In the preferred embodiment, the outputs from lookup tables 302, 304, and 306 have 8 bits, 9 bits, and 8 bits, respectively. Therefore, the
10 total on-chip memory storage is preferably 234 bits. However, it will be appreciated, that in alternative embodiments, the number of tables in compensator 300, the number of bits in the lookup tables, the number of possible values of digital error signal 152, and the total number of bits in on-chip memory storage may be lower than or greater than the numbers of these items disclosed in the preferred
15 embodiment described above.

In the preferred embodiment, the bit-lengths of the table entries are determined by the range of error signal 152 values (± 4) and by the desired precision of pole-zero placement. Adder 318 preferably produces a 10-bit signed value which is preferably reduced to 8-bit duty ratio signal 154 by eliminating the sign bit, and by
20 truncating the least significant bit.

To demonstrate closed-loop operation of the preferred embodiment, the controller chip was used with a synchronous buck converter as shown in FIG. 1. The input voltage V_g 102 was set between 4 V and 6 V, the output voltage 104 was regulated at $V_o = 2.7V$, the load current was set between 0 A and 2 A, and the
25 switching frequency was set to 1 MHz. The filter components used had values of $L_{210} = 1 \mu H$ (micro-Henry) and $C_{212} = 100\mu F$ (micro-Farads). Based on the standard averaged model of converter 200, compensator 300 was designed using the pole-zero matched method to achieve a loop cross-over frequency of approximately 50 KHz and a phase margin of about 50°. When converter 200 is
30 powered up, it loads compensator 300 table entries from external memory 160 and then starts to sample output voltage 104 and to produce pulsating waveform $c(t)$ 156.

FIG. 2 is a plot of the transient response of output voltage 104 and output current obtained with regulator 100 of FIG. 1. Experimental 50% - 100% load transient waveforms are shown in FIG. 2. In the preferred embodiment, V_o 104

remains within the $(\Delta V_o)_{\max}$ range 202. FIG. 13A is a plot of the measured load voltage 104 against load current for voltage regulator 100 of FIG. 1. FIG. 13B is a plot of the measured load voltage 104 against supply voltage 102 for voltage regulator 100 of FIG. 1.

5 There has been described a novel digital voltage controller. It should be understood that the particular embodiments shown in the drawings and described within this specification are for purposes of example and should not be construed to limit the invention, which will be described in the claims below. Further, it is evident that those skilled in the art may now make numerous uses and modifications of the
10 specific embodiments described, without departing from the inventive concepts. It is also evident that the methods recited may in many instances be performed in a different order; or equivalent structures and processes may be substituted for the various structures and processes described. Consequently, the invention is to be construed as embracing each and every novel feature and novel combination of
15 features present in and/or possessed by the invention herein described.

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A voltage controller (150) comprising:
a comparator (700) operative to compare a converter output voltage (104) to a
5 reference voltage (106) and generate a digital error signal (152) indicative of a
difference between said compared voltages;
a compensator (300), including a lookup table (302), for determining a digital
control signal (154) based on said generated digital error signal; and
a modulator (400) operative to provide a power control signal (156) in
10 response to said determined digital control signal.
2. The controller of claim 1 wherein said controller includes no passive
electronic components.
3. The controller of claim 1 wherein said comparator is implemented
entirely with digital logic gates.
- 15 4. The controller of claim 1 wherein all energy-storing components in said
controller are digital logic gates.
5. The controller of claim 1 wherein said comparator is a delay line
analog-to-digital converter (ADC) (700).
- 20 6. The controller of claim 5 wherein said delay line ADC comprises a
delay cell array (740).
7. The controller of claim 5 wherein said delay line ADC is operative to
provide a thermometer code output (772) indicative of said difference between said
compared voltages.
8. The controller of claim 7 wherein an extent of test signal propagation
25 through said delay line ADC establishes said thermometer code.
9. The controller of claim 7 wherein said delay line ADC comprises an
encoder (730) operative to convert said thermometer code into said digital error
signal.
10. The controller of claim 1 wherein said compensator comprises a
30 plurality of lookup tables (302), (304), (306), each lookup table including an entry.
11. The controller of claim 10 wherein each of said entries is a product of a
selected coefficient and a digital error magnitude corresponding to said generated
digital error signal.
12. The controller of claim 10 wherein an entry of said entries is a product

of a first coefficient and a present digital error magnitude.

13. The controller of claim 10 wherein an entry of said entries is a product of a second coefficient and a prior digital error magnitude.

14. The controller of claim 1 wherein said lookup table includes information
5 operative to implement a PID (proportional, integral, and derivative) control algorithm.

15. The controller of claim 1 wherein said compensator comprises an adder 318 operative to sum a plurality of products of digital error magnitudes and coefficients of said digital error magnitudes.

10 16. The controller of claim 1 wherein said modulator is a digital pulse width modulator.

17. The controller of claim 1 wherein said modulator comprises a counter (406) operative to determine a first component of a pulse-on period for said power control signal.

15 18. The controller of claim 1 wherein said modulator comprises a delay line (402) operative to determine a second component of a pulse-on period for said power control signal.

19. The controller of claim 1 wherein said modulator comprises:

20 a counter operative to determine a first component of a pulse-on period for said power control signal; and

a delay line operative to determine a second component of said pulse-on period for said power control signal.

20. An analog to digital converter (ADC) (700) comprising:

an array (740) of delay cells;

25 an input voltage (108) providing power to each said cell; and

a signal tap array (780) coupled to said delay cell array.

21. The ADC of claim 20 wherein said delay cells are digital logic gates.

22. The ADC of claim 20 wherein said ADC includes no passive analog components.

30 23. The ADC of claim 20 wherein a speed of test signal propagation through said delay cell array is substantially proportional to a magnitude of said input voltage.

24. The ADC of claim 23 wherein said signal tap array comprises a signal tap (728) coupled to each said delay cell.

25. The ADC of claim 24 wherein statuses of said signal taps are indicative of said signal propagation speed through said delay cell array.

26. The ADC of claim 20 further comprising an encoder for converting thermometer code (772) from said signal tap array into a digital error signal.

5 27. The ADC of claim 20 wherein said ADC includes no capacitors or inductors.

28. The ADC of claim 20 wherein said ADC includes no capacitors, inductors, or resistors.

10 29. A voltage controller (150), the controller comprising:
a voltage comparator (700) operative to provide a digital error signal (152);
a compensator (300) operative to determine a digital control signal based on said provided error signal; and

a modulator (400) operative to provide a power control signal based on said determined digital control signal, wherein said comparator, said compensator, and
15 said modulator are implemented entirely with digital logic gates.

30. The voltage controller of claim 29 wherein all of said digital logic gates correspond to standard library cells.

31. The voltage controller of claim 29 wherein all of said digital logic gates are HDL (hardware description language)-compatible.

20 32. The voltage controller of claim 29 wherein said controller includes no passive electronic components.

33. The voltage controller of claim 29 wherein said controller includes no analog energy storage components.

25 34. The voltage controller of claim 29 wherein said controller includes no capacitors, inductors, or resistors.

35. A method for controlling voltage, the method comprising:
comparing (700) a converter output voltage with a reference voltage;
generating a digital error signal indicative of a result of said comparing; and
providing a power control signal (156) indicative of said generated error
30 signal, wherein said comparing, said generating, and said providing are performed entirely with digital logic gates.

36. The method of claim 35 wherein said comparing comprises powering a plurality of an array (740) of delay cells with said converter output voltage.

37. The method of claim 35 wherein said comparing comprises measuring

an extent of test signal propagation through an array of delay cells, said delay cells being powered by said converter output voltage.

38. The method of claim 35 wherein said providing comprises determining a digital control signal from said generated error signal according to a control algorithm.

39. The method of claim 38 wherein said determining comprises selecting a lookup table entry based on a value of said generated error signal.

40. The method of claim 35 wherein said providing comprises determining a duty ratio from said generated error signal according to a control algorithm.

41. A method of controlling voltage (150), the method comprising:
receiving a regulator output voltage (104);
converting said received output voltage into a digital error signal (152)
employing a delay line analog to digital converter (ADC) (700); and
adjusting said regulator output voltage based on said digital error signal.

42. The method of claim 41 wherein said converting comprises:
powering a delay cell array (740) with said received converter output voltage
104;
measuring a speed of test signal propagation through said powered delay cell array; and
generating said digital error signal indicative of said measured test signal propagation speed.

43. The method of claim 42 wherein said converting further comprises calibrating said delay line ADC.

44. The method of claim 43 wherein said calibrating comprises:
converting a reference voltage into a reference conversion error value
employing said delay line ADC; and
adding (1114) said reference conversion error value to said digital error signal, thereby providing a corrected digital error signal (1152).

45. The method of claim 43 wherein said calibrating comprises:
powering said delay cell array with a reference voltage (106);
measuring a speed of test signal propagation through said reference voltage-powered delay cell array;
generating a reference conversion error value (1108) indicative of said measured test signal propagation speed; and

adding (1114) said reference conversion error value to said generated digital error signal.

46. The method of claim 41 wherein said adjusting comprises determining a digital control signal based on said generated digital error signal according to a control algorithm.

47. A voltage controller (150) comprising:

a source of converter output voltage (104);

a delay line analog to digital converter (ADC) (700) responsive to said output voltage to generate a digital error signal (152) indicative of a difference between said output voltage and a previously stored reference voltage;

a digital electronic calculator (300) responsive to said digital error signal to generate a digital control signal; and

a pulse width modulator (400) responsive to said generated digital control signal to generate a pulse-on period for a power control signal.

48. The voltage controller of claim 47 wherein said delay line ADC is responsive to a comparison between an active source of reference voltage and said previously stored reference voltage to generate a reference conversion error value.

49. The voltage controller of claim 48 wherein said delay line ADC comprises a register (1106) to store said reference conversion error value.

50. The voltage controller of claim 49 wherein said delay line ADC further comprises a voltage comparison circuit (1114) responsive to said digital error signal and said reference conversion error value to generate a sum of said digital error signal and said reference conversion error value.

51. The voltage controller of claim 47 wherein said pulse width modulator comprises:

a counter (406) responsive to a first selection of bits of said digital control signal to generate a first component of said pulse-on period; and

a delay line (402) responsive to a second selection of bits of said digital control signal to generate a second component of said pulse-on period.

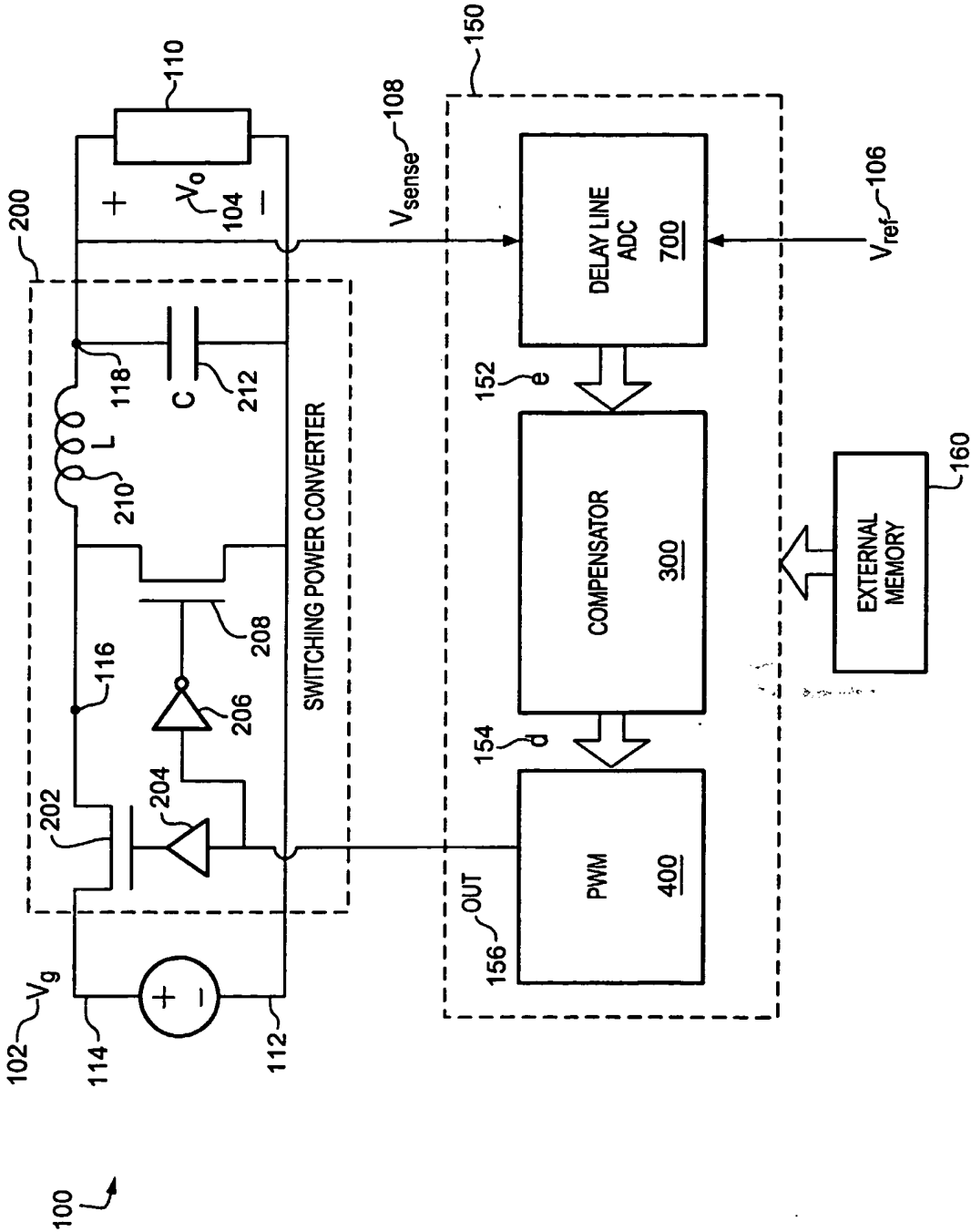


FIG. 1

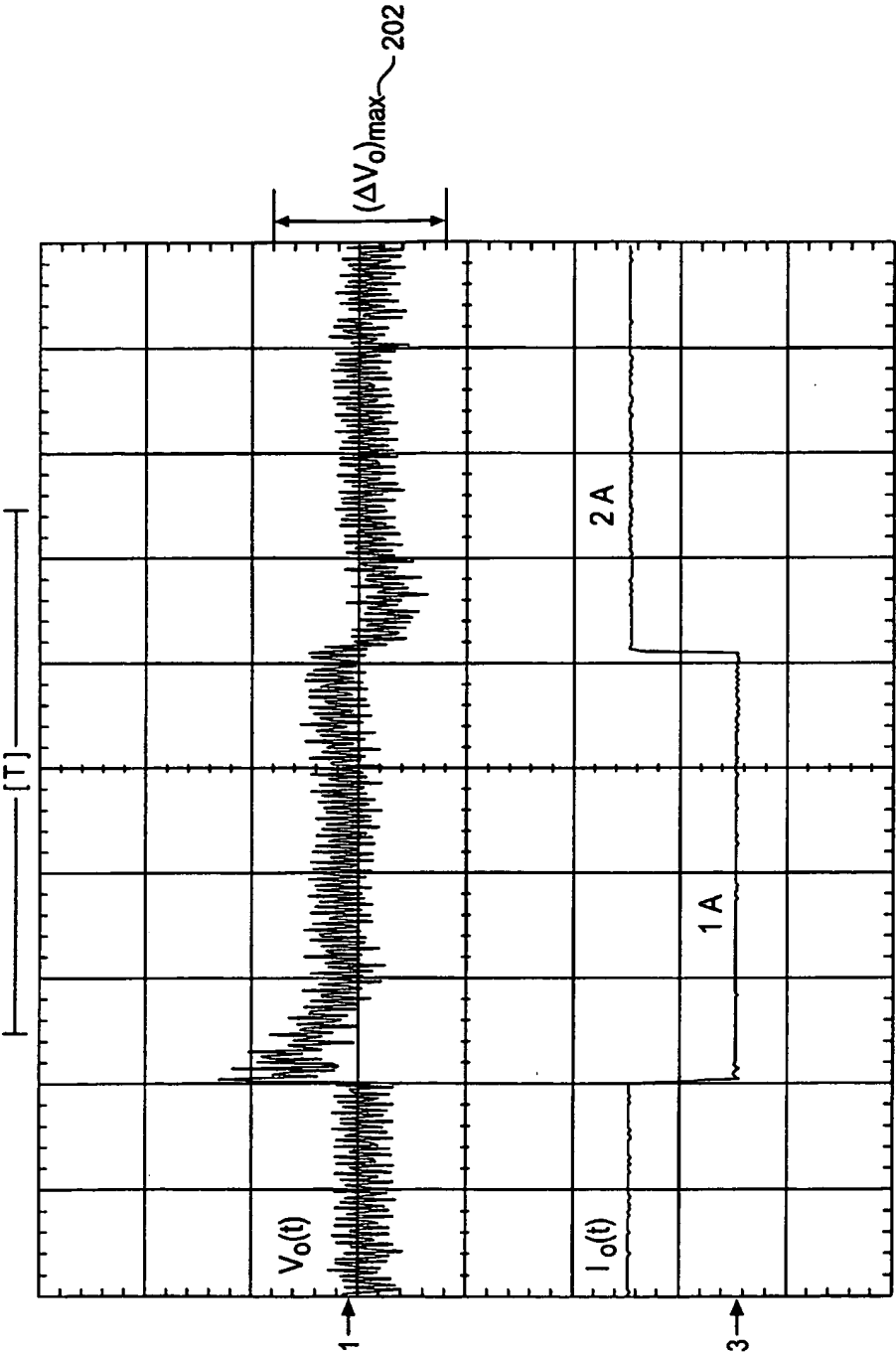


FIG. 2

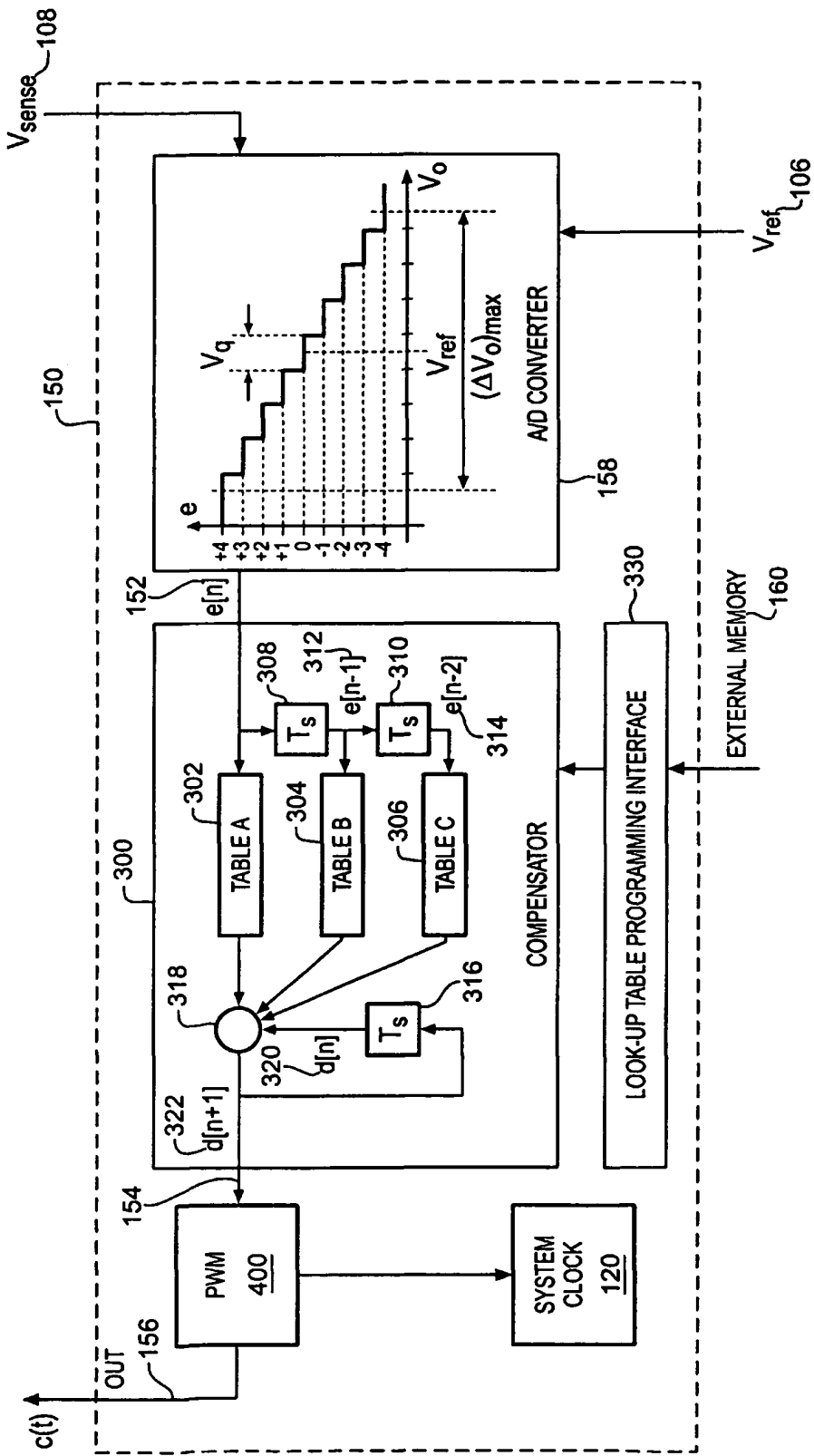


FIG. 3

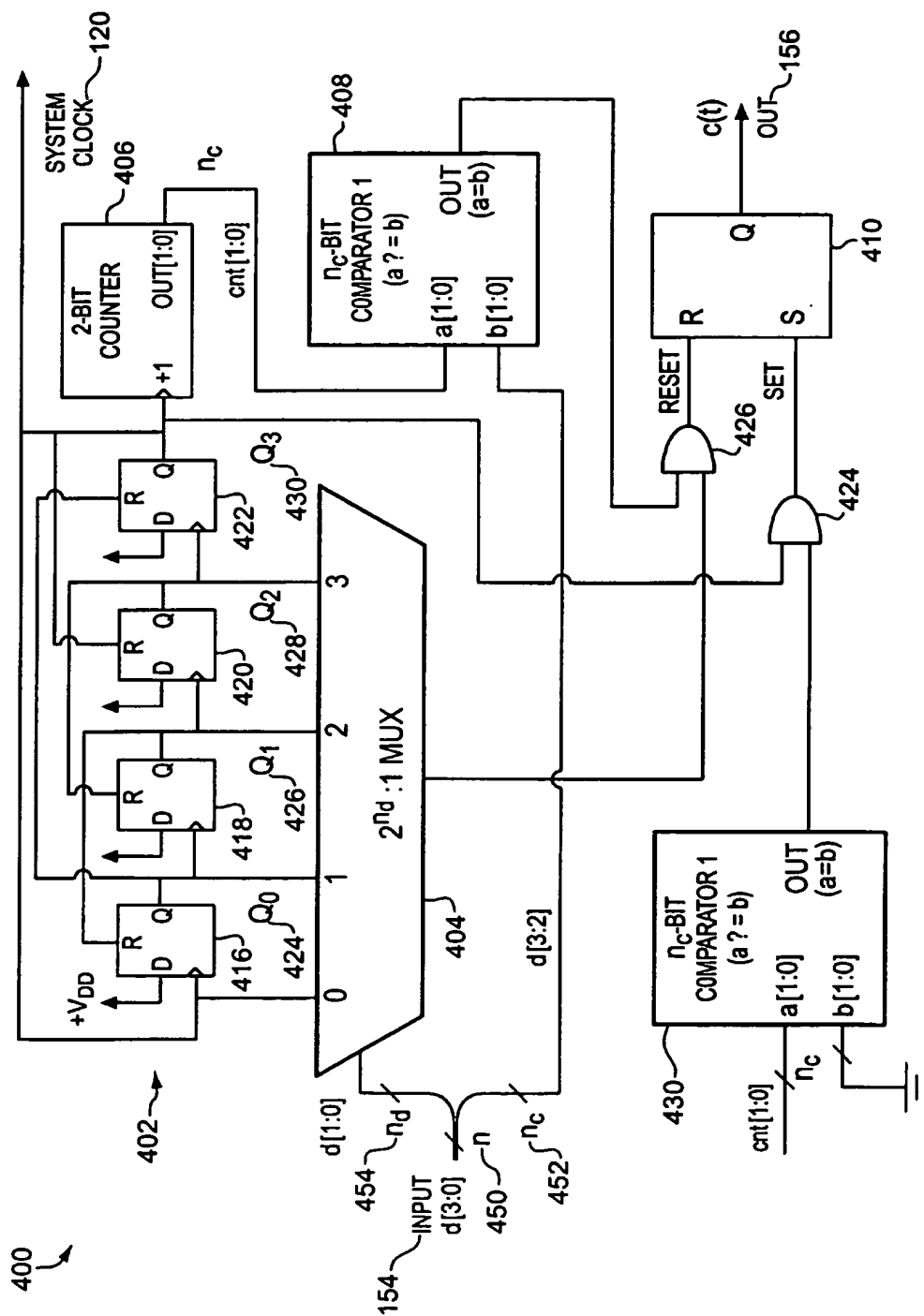


FIG. 4

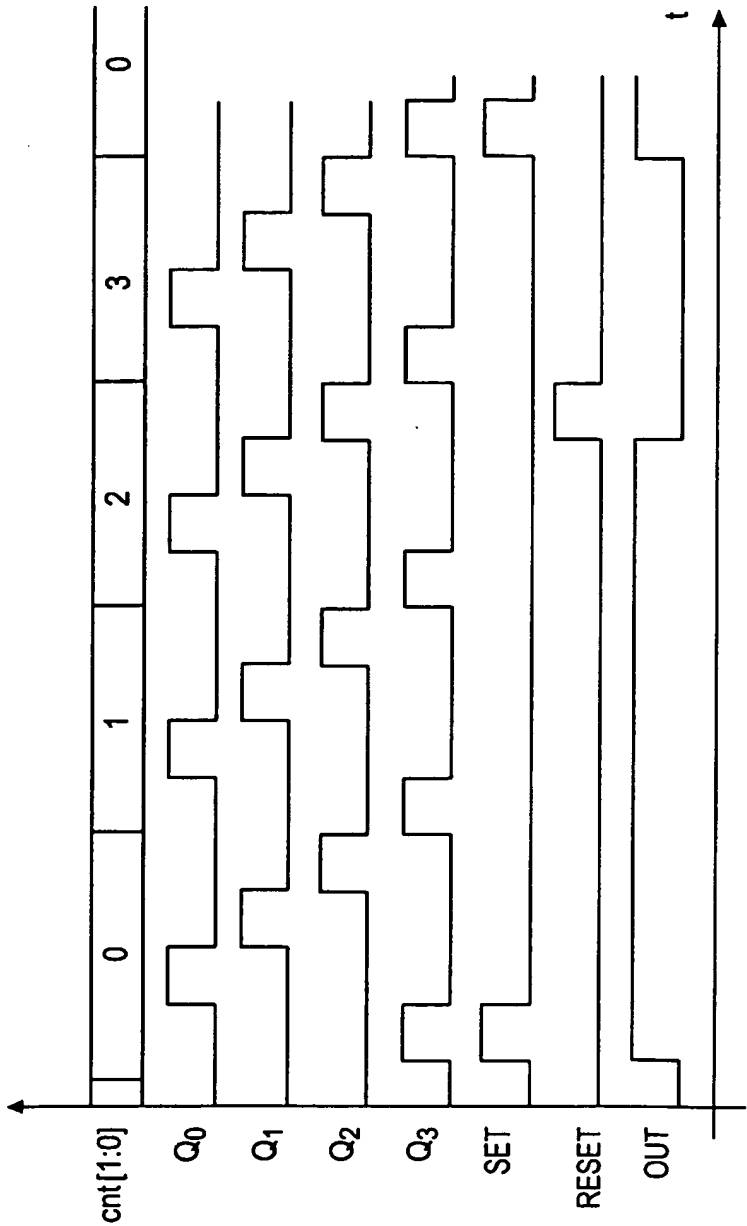
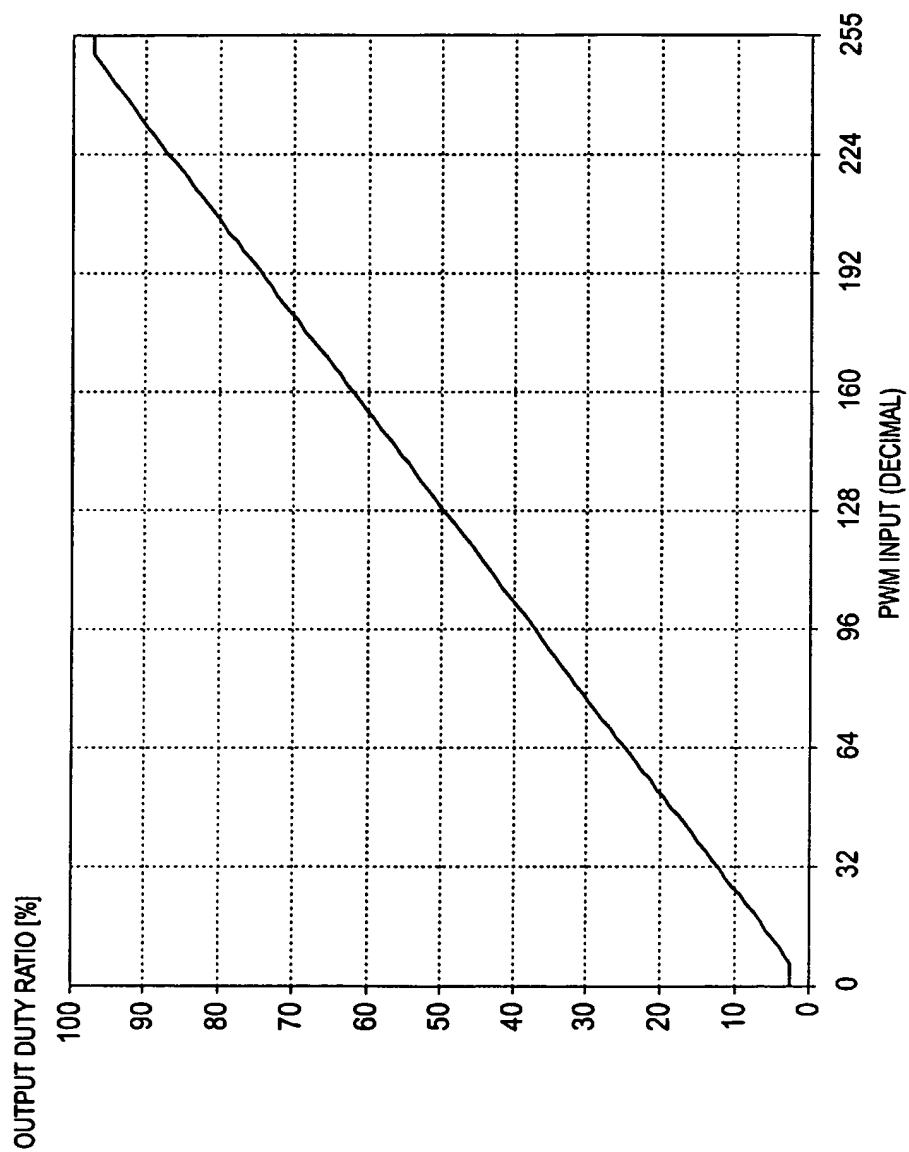


FIG. 5

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**FIG. 6**

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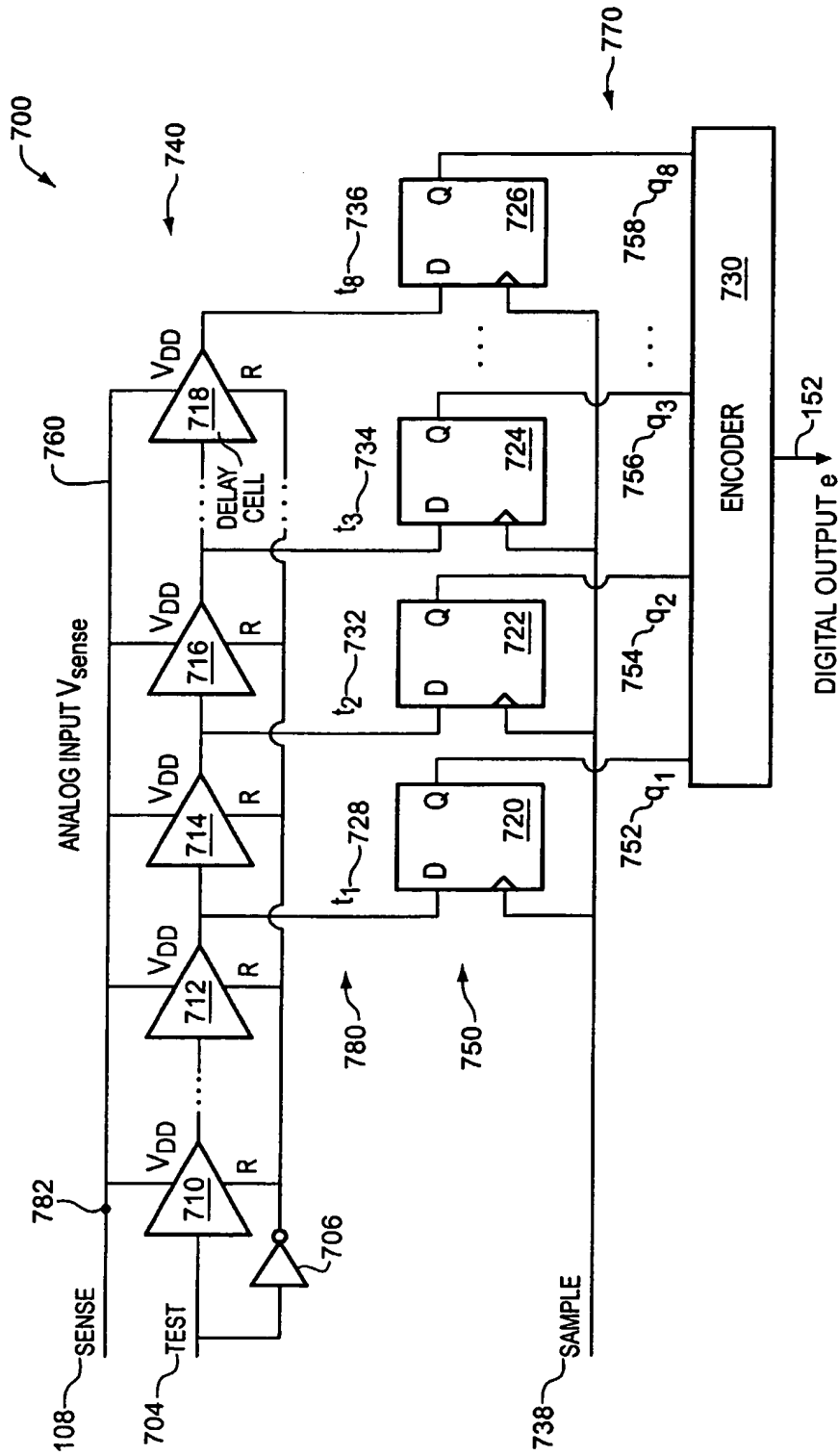


FIG. 7

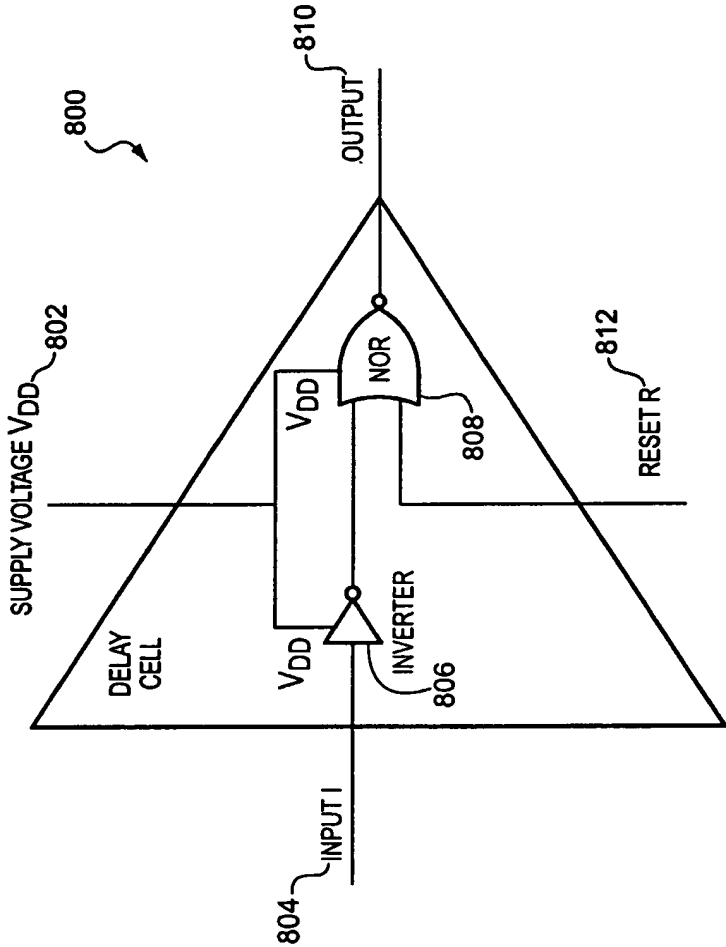


FIG. 8

900

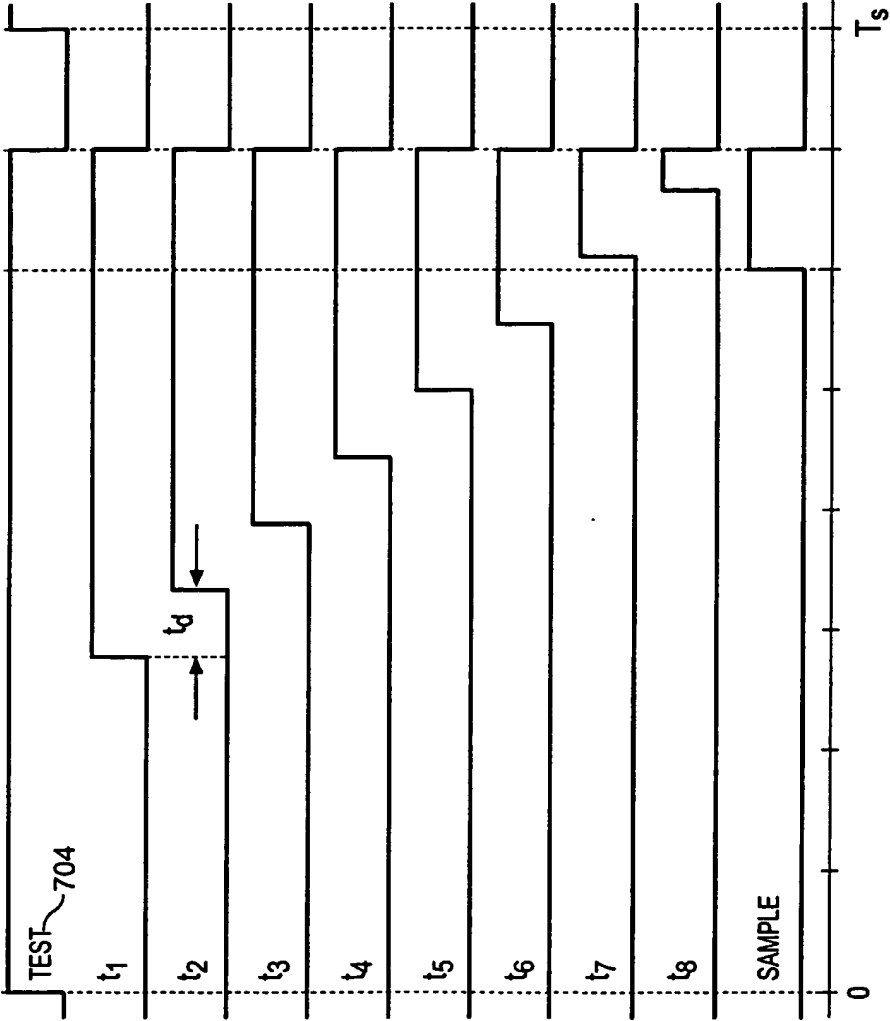


FIG. 9

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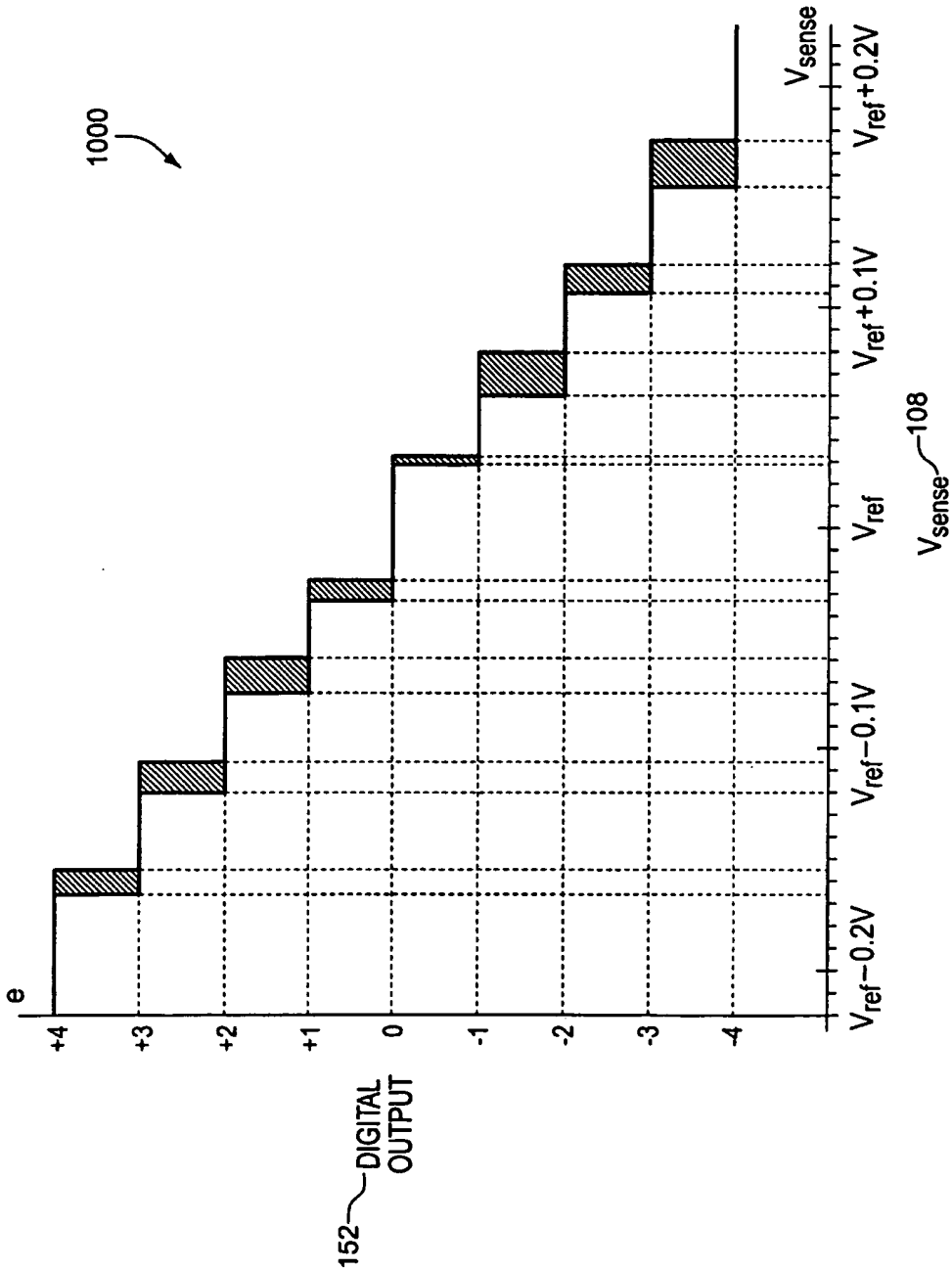


FIG. 10

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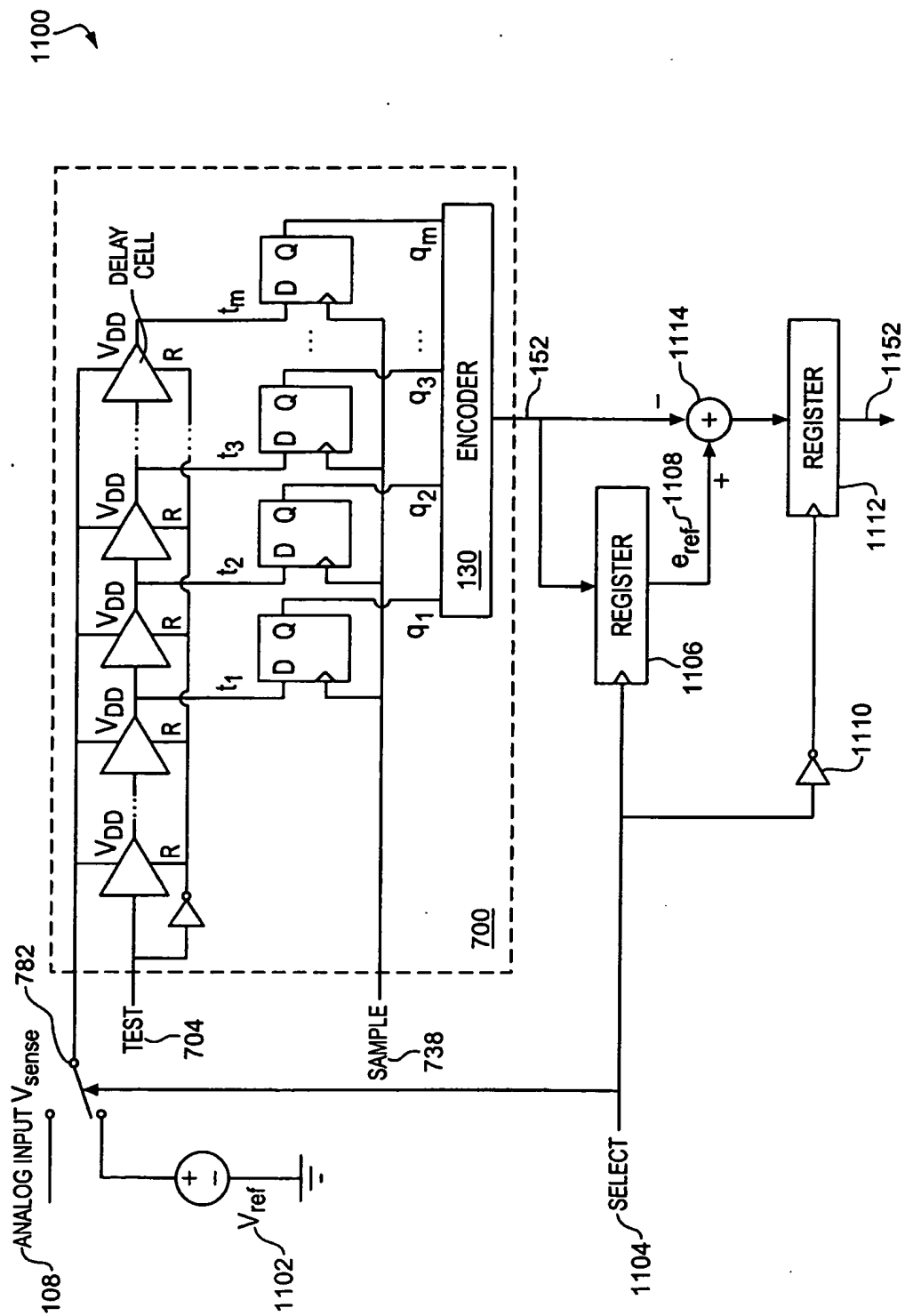


FIG. 11

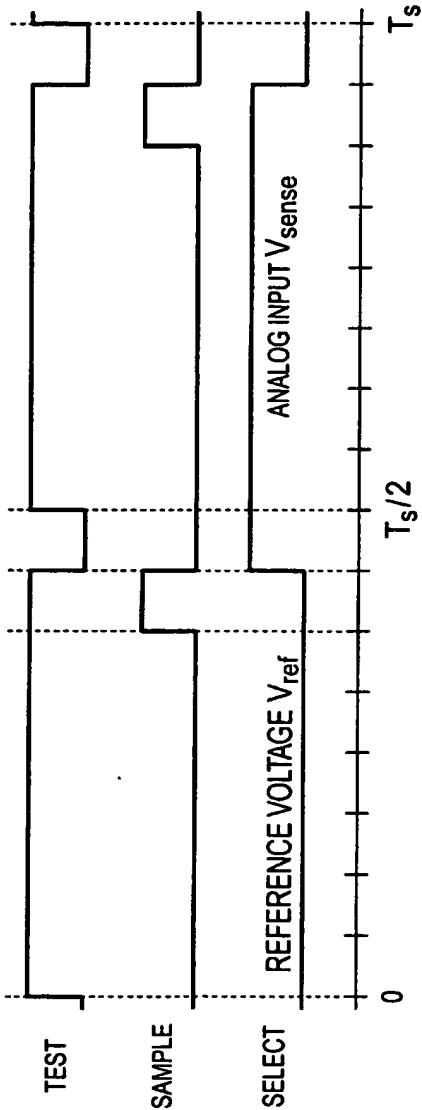
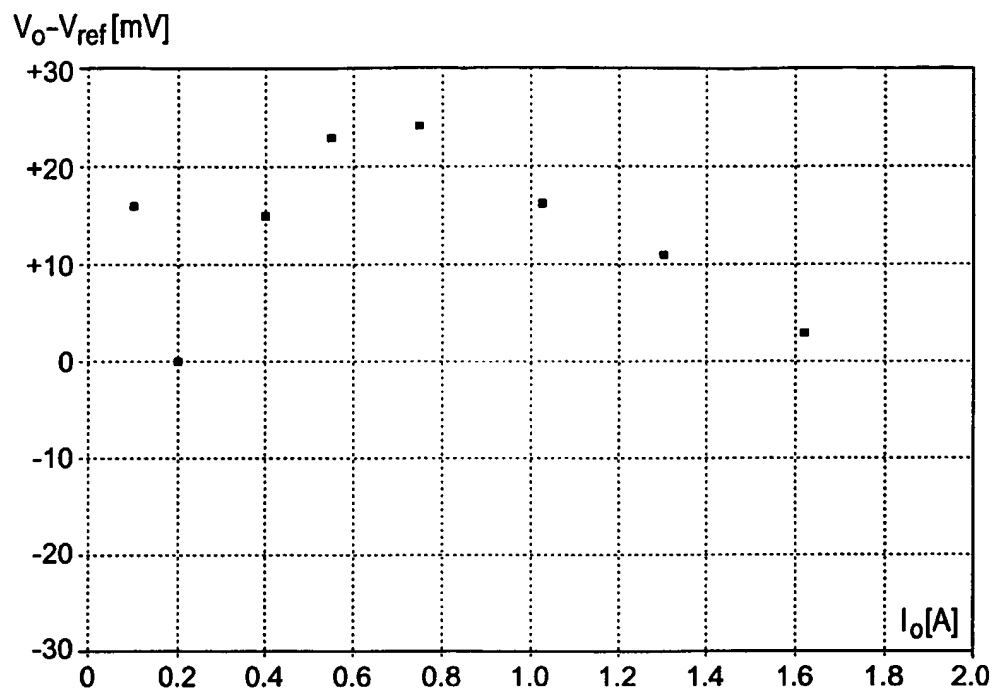
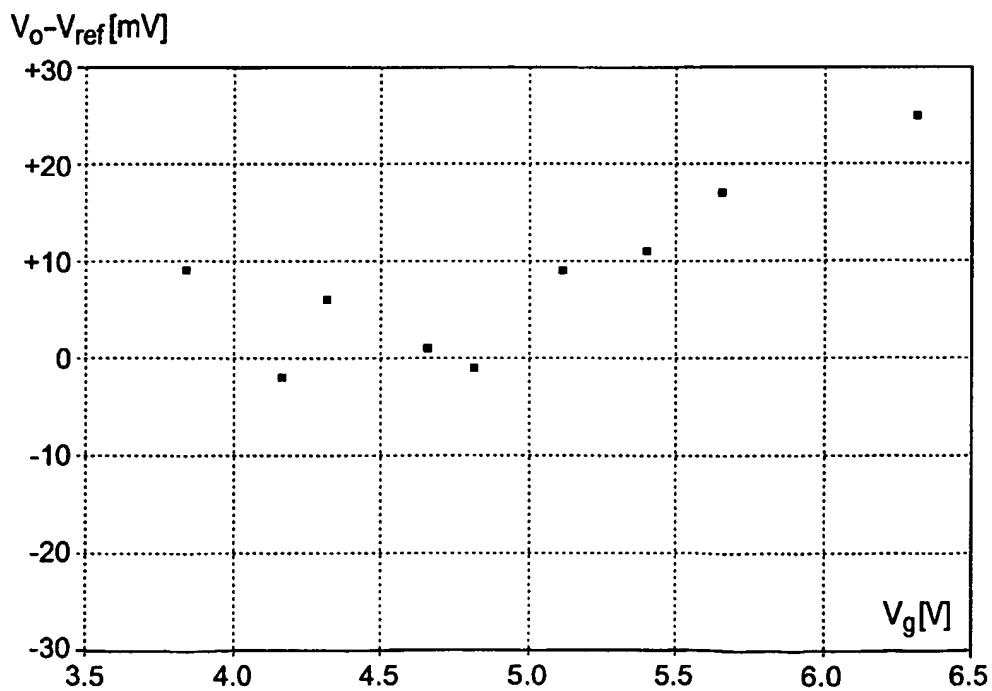


FIG. 12

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**FIG. 13A****FIG. 13B**

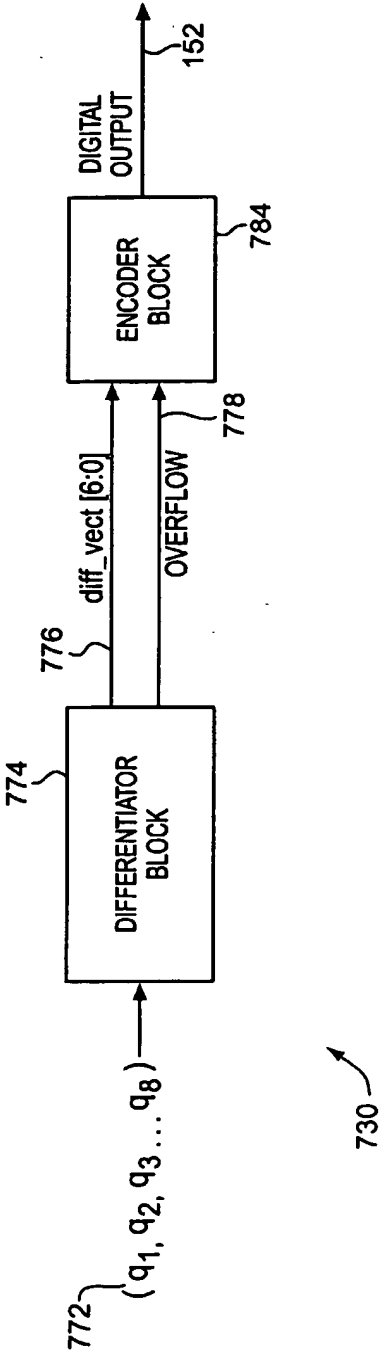


FIG. 14